THE MAN AND THE JOB

A BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS

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To the Men of June, 1910:

What I have to say to you in this brief address—the last before you go up for your baccalaureate degrees—is suggested by a consciousness of the vocational anxieties and ambitions with which you turn your faces away from these Heights toward the City, where most of you are to spend the rest of your days in struggle—in hard, unceasing, but joyous, struggle—not only for your own, but for the common good to which you are now life-pledged by your years of voluntary study here. Yet what I have to say is the prompting not only of the sympathy of one who, with a baccalaureate degree and at a greater age, faced with as much reason for anxiety the same vocational question only a few years ago, but also of a dissent from the injunction which is dissuading many a younger brother of yours in city, town and country, from the steep way you have taken—an injunction whose advice was not long ago tersely phrased in the title of an address by an eminent president of one of our leading institutions, "Make the man fit the job."

It is an injunction which many wish to make permanent in educational theory and practice in this republic, and it is difficult to resist, but I should present you, if I could, you, my young jobless idealists, in whom the City has tried to make her highest ideas incarnate, as my best argument for its dismissal; and I have no doubt of the decision, when the testimony of your lives is all in (as it will not be for forty or fifty years, if ever), for I believe that your contribution to this city and nation and world and your own being is to be far beyond any that would have come if you had missed the thorough and broad teaching and had not caught into your torches the fire from this high altar.

But I cannot wait for this evidence; I would reach your younger brothers today, that precious, noisy multitude whose voices one speaks of hearing (as we all ought to hear them), "rising clear

above the roar of industrialism and the prudent councils of commerce,"—the voices of "wistful over-confident creatures" crying through our streets: "With us all things are possible."

I can hardly keep myself from stopping many a one of them every day, as I have stopped one now and then, and saying: "But all things will soon cease to be possible unless you keep struggling toward the impossible, unless you fit yourself for something more than your little task or job. Some day your all-conquering dreams will wither to the size of that little daily task." Only yesterday, I sat by a boy in the subway, a boy who said his name was a synonym in his father's language for a place of disaster. I saw the all-ambitious light in his eye, but he told me his plans; and I saw the light dim into that of a candle; not that I would keep him from the vocation, but because I would see him first a man.

And then I find myself turning to the great o'er-shadowing, environing, conventionalizing society and saying, "Why do you make vocation the end and the measure of the life of these youth? For it seems quite as absurd as that ancient cosmic theory of the universe, which made the sun and stars revolve around the earth, now seems to the astronomer on our tower."

To be sure the man has always appeared to revolve around the job (just as the sun has always appeared to revolve around the earth). Our first ancestor of Scripture record found his life circling as regularly as the sun about the tasks of a vocation (a vocation for which preparation is now had not in a paradise of natural history and leisure, but in the study of soils and silos and crops). And his descendants had not passed seven generations before they were divided into cattlemen, musicians and incipient engineers: for the record runs that Lamech, the grandson of Adam, five times removed, had three sons: Jabal, Jubal and Tubal—Jabal the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle; Jubal the father of all that handle the harp and the organ, and Tubal the inventor of every cutting instrument of brass and iron. So soon did the Ptolemaic geocentric theory of the universe become the ergocentric, that is the job-centered theory of human life on the earth.

Today, not to speak of intervening centuries, turn to the

modern biographical dictionary in the library or to "Who's Who" in the office, and you find that James Jones Jabal is set down, not as a man of certain character, but as a meat packer, that John Jubal is identified not as a man of masterful or kindly soul, but as an "educator," and that Thomas Tubal is not listed at all, being a mechanic. The first question we ask concerning any man is "Who is he?" and concerning a boy "What is he to be?" and the answer tells us that the man is, or the boy is to be, a banker, a farmer, a doctor, an electrical engineer, a broker, a motorman. The vocation identifies the man and fixes his place in the social organization, even in a democracy. And if he is not so identified, it is generally because he is a poet, an idler, a vagrant, an almoner, a lunatic. Civilization has set everybody to work (which is all well enough), but she has also been insistent upon classifying or stratifying him according to the particular kind of work that he does (which is *not* well enough).

And it is because Civilization, especially in its older settled communities, is guided by the external appearances and accidents of men. It teaches the educational and social astronomy of the ancient son of Sirach as it was uttered thousands of years ago: "How shall he become wise that holdeth a plow, that glorieth in the shaft of the goad, that driveth oxen and is occupied in their labors." . . . "He will set his heart upon his furrows." . . . "So is every artificer . . . so is the smith sitting by the anvil and considering the unwrought iron . . . so is the potter . . . all these put their trust in their hands. Without these shall not a city be inhabited"; "they shall maintain the fabric of the world and in the handiwork of their craft is their prayer," "but they shall not be sought for in the council of the people." "Not so he that hath applied his soul and meditateth in the law of the Most High." That is, according to that ancient wisdom, the application of the soul or the intellect and meditation on the laws of life and of the universe, are not for him who is to put his trust in his hands or to become wise in his works. He is to merely "consider the unwrought iron," "to discourse of the stock of bulls," and to "bend the strength of the clay in front of his feet." The sky of his life is like the Ptolemaic hollow spheres that but carry light in their diurnal revolutions for his

particular job—a job which in these days has become so minute and monotonous a process as to rob him even of the joy of his handiwork, and of all "heart for perfecting his works." It is against this theory of education in a democracy that I speak through you.

It is true that the sun gives no more light, direct light, under our Copernican system than it did in the old Ptolemaic days. But what a boundless universe has been opened to man by having his little earth put where it really belongs in relation to that light. His indirect light has been multiplied a million fold and carried even into the night by a knowledge of the laws that have sprung from the heliocentric theory. And whether you put the job or the man at the center of your social or educational system, whether you think of him as an industrial productive unit or as a spiritual force, the world's work has still to be done. The anthropocentric theory of life does not reduce it, except to eliminate that which is vain and futile in any sane mode of life. But what a different world and a different work it becomes when the man or woman or the boy or girl becomes the center of it instead of the iron that has to be wrought, or the clay that has to be moulded or the cattle that have to be herded, or the millions of trinkets and useless things that have to be manufactured that we may not be surpassed by some other country in trade.

In the plans for industrial training which are now arousing so much favorable interest, this must be made and kept the cardinal principle. Center the thought and the educational system at the man and not at the product.

You are going forth as Copernicans. You have come into communication with other worlds; you have touched the things of all life, the eternal. You have become citizens of the universe. But you go now where this theory is not so generally held, where the vocation is the life for millions. And you go anxiously, I know. Like an ancient disciple of Copernicus you will be tempted to give up your theory; but do not let go of it. I could almost wish that you might not easily find your vocations, that the stuff in you should thus be more fiercely tested. And if the vocational adjustment is not immediately made, it is not to be assumed, as

it generally is, that the fault is with the training that gives one the Copernican view of life.

But if you are a true Copernican you will not be afraid of any honest vocation. I heard President Roosevelt say long ago that, if any man of his regiment had asked to be favored because he was a college man, he would have had him discharged, forthwith. The *privileges* that your degree gives you are to take the hardest jobs, and the *immunities* are to be free of the selfish ones. It is for the men of your training and theory of life to glorify every vocation that your hands touch, even as the sun glorifies every planet or satellite or nebulous ring of a duty that it shines upon.

I wrote to William James, the philosopher, a few weeks ago, after reading an essay of his on the "Moral Equivalent of War," to say that I hoped to raise in this College a regiment for his great army, and I should like to begin with this class and send it forth as the first company; a hundred men, not conscripts, as he suggests, but volunteers, owned by an ideal "as the soldiers are owned by an army"—a hundred men who feel that it is "worth a blood-tax" to belong to what he calls a "collectivity," superior in *any* ideal aspect. And as he would have those of the luxurious classes conscripted to be sent to the coal and iron mines, to freight trains, to fishing fleets, to dishwashing, clothes washing, and window washing, to road building and tunnel building, to foundries and stoke holes, to the frames of sky scrapers, in order that they might know "the sour and hard foundations of the higher life," so would I have you conscripted by your ideals to give yourselves as a soldier gives himself in self-forgetfulness, with the soldier's faith, in the campaign against conditions which have compelled so many to narrow, gray, comfortless, and all but hopeless lives. If war were declared in a good cause to-day and you were needed, you would throw aside your academic gowns and enlist at once. In that same spirit should you put off your gowns this week.

So far from discouraging you from entering those vocations which are not yet known as professions, because they are still pursued wholly or generally for gain and selfish good, I would have you make whatever you find fit you in your largest selves,

and so become ennobled to the height and breadth of the spirit of your service.

My thesis is, as you see, "Make the job fit the man."

The city smiled a few days ago over the report that a rat-catcher conversed with the Mayor of this city about the teachings of an ancient philosopher. And you will perhaps smile when I tell you that of all the words written or spoken to me about the addresses that I have made in the past to your brother bachelors of arts and science, those which have revealed the keenest appreciation of what I have tried to say came from a barber—an Italian barber, a son of the people of Cicero and Dante and Raphael and Michael Angelo. I have recently been reading with great delight the letters of Petrarch to classical writers dead long before his time, Virgil, Cicero, Horace, and others, collected and translated by one of our instructors, but I have felt that the dead writers of the past were speaking to me in the voice of this, their living representative, who exclaims, "Ite ad Americam," meaning by America, I think, not a place where one can earn a livelihood by barbering but a place where life is more than barbering—more than the vocation.

But if you smile contemptuously or good-naturedly at the learned rat-catcher who reads the classics and at the barber who sends me with his letter, for my reading, a copy of Sir John Lubbock's "Pleasures of Life," my answer is that they, super-vocationalists, are probably having more happiness in living than the hypercritical, over-practical sub-men (as contrasted with supermen) to whom life is measured in "ergons," that is, in units of material productivity.

And the College is not to forget that it has, as President Lowell of Harvard says, a great work to do for the American people—that it is "an institution which can give a freedom of thought, a breadth of outlook, and a training for citizenship" which no other institution in this country can give. It should not be affrighted into narrowness or ergocentric efficiency by the Ptolemaic philosophy of life.

I think often of the conversation between the Bishop of Blougram and Gigadibs in the well-known "Apology" by

Browning: "We are two college friends; suppose," says the Bishop,

"We mortals cross the ocean of the world
Each in the cabin of a life."

And they then debate what one should take with him on such a journey, even as we discuss our college curriculum from year to year. You make, says the Bishop, your landsman's list, "a piano-forte, all Balzac's novels, the little Greek books they get up so beautifully in Leipzig, a framed Corregio's 'fleeting glow,'" only to hear the practical man of the sea, the agent or the captain, cry, "Your cabin's six feet square," as if to say "There's room for none of these things, Greek, literature, art—for nothing save your bare sea-furniture."

But if you have heard of the contents of a library carried by a certain traveler into the heart of Africa and have read even the titles of the books he has read "crossing the ocean of the world," you will not take the advice of the practical man; you will push past him, knowing that even in the busiest life, that is, even in the smallest surplus of cabin, there is room for your æsthetics, your love of music, your Greek and French, your history and science. The "White Knight" in a certain story, starting on a long journey, took a mousetrap lest he should be troubled by mice at night, and a beehive, thinking that he might come upon a swarm of bees. It is such and other anxious thoughts of the morrow furniture that often takes the space we might give to the Corregio and the pig-skin library.

I have written these few words to you, young men, under stress and strain,—in the train, both under and over the earth, at my desk amid many interruptions. It is no quiet, reflective, academic treatise. The noises of the streets have disturbed some of its sentences and the life of the city has run between its lines.

Our great citizen returning from the forests and the ancient seats of civilization and learning has walked robustly across one of its pages as you are aware and has made me look after him with increasing wonderment at the achievement of a vocationless man (for we remember with difficulty what his particular vocation was). But my thoughts have come back to you after each interruption with a desire of bringing to you all that is added to

my own experience, and of finding in you something to answer the need of that disturbing city, that "collectivity" as William James would call it, which is superior at least in the aspiration expressed through this College; of finding in you the common multiple of all we have desired for you in these years. You go, carrying a part of ourselves in you and with you. We came into this College together, you and I. I almost wish that I could go out with you to test my own advice to you; but I can send only that to which my words give utterance and of which your own lives here have had frequent advice. And as you go I repeat what a poet once said of you:

> "Ye shall hear from them, country mine,
> Hewers and builders, captains of men,
> Thinkers, poets divine."

For, hewers or poets, you will carry the strength and vision of men and to these the task will be fitted.

I was ploughing in the field years ago on a summer's day, such as this, when I heard a singing sound in the air above me. I soon discovered that it was made by a swarm of bees traveling toward the woods. With the wisdom of the fields, I threw clods of earth up into the midst of the swarm to stop it in its flight and succeeded in bringing it down upon the bough of a boundary tree. The thought of that incident has come back to me to-day for the first time in years. Your ambitions are singing over my head, as you swarm from this parent hive and start toward a freer life. And I, still a good deal of a ploughman, have followed your ambitions with these clods of speech to bring them down to tireless industry in this wonderful garden of human hopes upon which our towers look out,—this city of promise which you are to help make the promised city.

JOHN H. FINLEY.